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BIBLE STUDY IN THE FAR WEST.

By Rev. THOMAS F. DAY,

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It is often asserted that the Christian minister in the far West cannot possibly maintain critical habits of study, or attain excellence as a preacher, because of the peculiar conditions under which he labors. That serious difficulties are in the way, all must admit. The theological graduate who goes west to "grow up with the country," finds the country already well advanced on lines that call for repression. Sin is riotous. His attitude must be that of uncompromising protest. If the people around him are not hostile to his work, they are at least prevailingly out of sympathy with it. His warfare is a double one. He must strive to infuse a purer moral tone into the life of the community; and he must consciously beat back the influences that assail his own spirituality. The danger is that he will lose both intellectual and spiritual vigor without realizing it. His surroundings are unfavorable to studious habits. Unless he strongly fortifies himself with native resolution, he will insensibly decline in the matter of preparation for the pulpit. After exhausting his reserve fund, the chances are that he will drivel.

Again, the frontier preacher is at a disadvantage by reason of his isolation. He is deprived of those quickening human companionships which are both a gauge and a stimulus to effort. His appliances for study, perhaps, are few. "The hundred best books" are for the most part on the shelves of another; and that other is too far off to be a convenient lender. The choice new books are known to him only through the echoes of a chance review. The "invaluable work" which "no clergyman can afford to be without" (see the latest advertisement), he cannot afford to buy! But the *one* best book is already his; and, despite what the advertisements say, he can afford to go without a great many other books, if he but make good use of this.

No matter how isolated the western preacher may be, or how limited his critical apparatus, or how dull and uninspiring his environment, it is possible for him to devote *some* of his time to conscientious and critical study of the Scriptures in their original tongues. The contention is not that it is always easy, but that it is possible. Moreover, this is the price he must pay, if he would promote thoughtfulness in his people, and keep his own thoughts from becoming stale and trivial. The secret of growth, freshness, usefulness, other things being equal, is with him who studies. Let his privations be what they may, his is not a case that calls for pity, if to his other graces he adds the grace of daily communion with the Holy Spirit speaking through the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures.

The trouble with most western pastors is, that they have gotten behind, and it seems impossible ever to catch up. Their Hebrew has become "mis-laid"; they are sadly in arrears with "Westcott and Hort." Worse still, their enthusiasm is gone. The fires need rekindling. The desideratum is not *time* so much as *stimulus*. And the largest praise is due the "Correspondence School of Hebrew" for the friendly hand held out to those who have thus lost their grip and become discouraged. The present interest in Hebrew study in the Territory of Utah is directly traceable to its influence. The Utah Hebrew Club was organized in the fall of 1888, with ten members; of these five were pupils in the Correspondence

School. One of the objects aimed at in the formation of this club was the establishment of a local Summer School of Hebrew. By request a brief statement is here given of the results thus far accomplished.

So quiet and unpretentious a movement deserves no notice at all, except perhaps as showing what may be done in the way of self-help by Bible students remote from centers of instruction. Really, three persons of one mind in this matter will constitute a progressive and prosperous Bible school. And there were *five* students enrolled in the Summer School of Hebrew that was held in the Presbyterian church at American Fork, Utah, July 22-August 10, 1889. Of this number, two were ladies—one a missionary teacher, and the other a pastor's wife. Both had been pupils in Prof. Harper's Correspondence School. The other three were ministers, of whom one is a recent graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary, and the remaining two are home missionaries of long residence in Utah. One of the ministers had done some work previously by correspondence. The graduate above mentioned was prevented by ill-health from taking Hebrew in the seminary.

Plans previously made, and which could not be changed, prevented some from attending the school, whose interest and sympathy were at the same time cordially expressed. The enthusiasm of those who came ensured the success of the enterprise from the start. A beginners' class was formed, which covered the ground of the first twenty-five lessons in Harper's Introductory Hebrew Method. The reviewers' class completed the book. An hour before breakfast each day was devoted to sight reading in First Samuel. All of the Hebrew word lists were memorized. The work was characterized by painstaking zeal, and the appetite for Hebrew grew perceptibly.

A small beginning truly! but not on that account to be despised. The plan of holding a similar school next year met with favor. Several new members have recently joined the club. Prof. E. L. Curtis, of the chair of Hebrew in McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, promises to come and lend assistance in the conduct of the school next year; and the prospect of a considerably increased attendance is every way encouraging.

That the critical study of the Bible in the original will exert a wholesome influence upon the more popular study of the English Bible, requires no demonstration. It is proper, however, in this connection to refer briefly to a plan of systematic study of the English Bible which has been in operation for three or four years among the members of the Presbytery of Utah. Thus far, owing to the pressure of other work, only one week each year has been devoted to united study. In former years the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea, the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews have been studied with more or less care, in whole or in part. This year the time was given to Haggai and Zechariah, and First Peter. Next year exclusive attention will be given to some portion of the Old Testament. The average attendance at these meetings is between thirty and forty. Some of the teachers make a journey of two hundred miles—half of that distance by stage—in order to attend. New and better methods are applied from year to year. At the same time the work is done with a true missionary fervor, and with an intensely practical aim. Ministers and teachers alike come to this place of study, after a hard year's fight with a system of grossest error, in order to fill their quivers with fresh arrows wherewith to reach "the heart of the King's enemies" (Ps. 45:5).